

**WINNING THE PEACE IN IRAQ:
CONFRONTING AMERICA'S INFORMATIONAL AND DOCTRINAL HANDI-
CAPS**

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military has proven itself the premier fighting force in the world. In Panama, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, American forces moved with speed and agility, crushing enemy forces. However, victory in combat is only a penultimate step in the larger task of “winning the peace.” Winning the peace involves aligning the “hearts and minds” of a people with American political objectives, thus creating a politically and economically stable nation friendly to U.S. interests. However, in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), America’s ability to win the peace is in doubt. While even critics of OIF recognize its military brilliance, the peace-winning efforts of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) have come under intense criticism. U.S. forces are struggling to balance the doctrinal principles of security and legitimacy. Furthermore, they are doing it without a strong doctrinal foundation that prescribes important post-war practices. Consequently, victory appears distant, despite President Bush’s declaration of the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Coalition forces continue to encounter resistance. This, however, is not surprising. Undeniably, U.S. efforts are handicapped. Winning the peace in Iraq has been elusive because of a failure to win Iraqi hearts and minds, friction between security and legitimacy, and a failure of doctrine to underscore important post-war practices.

Winning Hearts and Minds

Many roadblocks exist to winning hearts and minds in post-war Iraq: the most important is American ethnocentrism. U.S. soldiers and statesmen generally lack understanding of the Arab worldview. “[The U.S. is] at a huge disadvantage,” says Michael Nacht, Dean of the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley.¹ Part of America’s

inability to persuade the Iraqis derives from their very foreignness and America's inability to fully understand their psychology. Only Arabs fully understand their own paradigm, but cultural training could help American occupiers to be more attuned to Arab sensibilities.

Regrettably, many U.S. soldiers in theater received little or no cultural training before deploying, and linguists are in short supply. This lack of cultural training is prevalent even among Army PSYOP forces, which are broadcasting messages to the population via leaflet and loud-speaker.² Although U.S. forces use some language translation technologies, they cannot hope to do an adequate job of communicating with the population without cultural education. A former political adviser to then-CENTCOM Commander General Norman Schwarzkopf has observed the difficulty of bridging this cultural gap. Ambassador Gordon S. Brown notes, "It is very hard to win hearts and minds in Iraq, if you don't understand the Arab mind."³

Winning Iraqi hearts and minds is further impeded by an omnipresent anti-Western sentiment among Arabs. A strong American presence in Iraq is insufferable to the population. "It is a source of humiliation and resentment for pretty much all locals," writes Kenneth Pollack, "a constant reminder that the descendants of the great Islamic empires can no longer defend themselves and must answer to infidel powers."⁴ This sentiment is exacerbated by the political, economic, and social stagnation of many Arab states, and a general failure to come to grips with modernity makes the populace feel threatened and stifled, fanning the flames of discontent.⁵ This baggage is part of what makes Iraq and much of the Islamic world different from America.

But the Islamic world is not just different from America, it is actually hostile to American values. In some states, Islamic clerics promote visceral anti-Americanism to students as young as four years old, so that when George Bush says, "This is not a war against Islam," and Osama

bin Laden says, “It is,” it’s easy to guess who they believe.⁶ Because of this dynamic, convincing the Iraqis of the coalition’s benign motives will be a hard sell, regardless of the best efforts of the CPA. Thus it must wage the fight for acceptance as a liberator and rebuilders of Iraq not merely with rhetoric, but with results. Showing the Iraqis tangible results on the ground is the only thing that will convince them that their lives are better.⁷ That is why the CPA is striving to provide basic services such as water, gas, electricity, and security so quickly. Shortcomings in these areas not only hurt Iraqis; they also attract the attention of the world media.

The international news media is a third party in the information campaign in Iraq, and as interlocutors between the CPA and the people, they are an additional source of friction in winning Iraqi hearts and minds. Negative reporting from Al Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, or CNN often degrades coalition efforts to “connect” with Iraqis, undermining U.S. political efforts in the region. Given a choice between reporting a success story about U.S. forces rebuilding an Iraqi school or a story where Iraqi guerrillas killed a U.S. soldier, journalists will almost always report the violence. As a result, many news sources highlight coalition failures in Iraq but neglect to report the successes—good news simply can’t compete with bad news. Ironically, it is not enough to be successful; it is essential for Iraqis to *see* the CPA successfully rebuilding their country and bringing necessities to them. That effort to be visible is hampered not only by what is considered newsworthy in the journalistic marketplace, but also by the gradually shifting focus of world journalism. After Saddam’s statues fell, many reporters left Iraq to chase other stories. President Bush’s use of intelligence in his “cause for war” speech, violence in Palestine, blackouts at home, and other stories have begun to compete with events inside Iraq for news media coverage. With no surplus of journalists on the ground, and no shortage of car bombs and ambushes to

cover, it is little wonder that news from Iraq is grim. Reconstruction efforts, while paramount to coalition success, are just not all that interesting to the international media.

Nevertheless, there are bright spots in the battle for Iraqi hearts and minds. Army engineer battalions are working every day to repair the crumbling infrastructure of Iraq's largest city, Baghdad. Sometimes, Iraqi citizens cooperate. In one municipality, between 60 and 200 Iraqis show up every day to help patch up their neighborhoods. U.S. forces pay them in Iraqi dinars and American dollars (about \$5-\$7 per day) from funds that are loosely intended for the "betterment of the Iraqi people."⁸ This wide latitude in spending results in U.S. construction teams and local Iraqis fixing schools, hospitals, and other public buildings in a true spirit of cooperation. This progress is encouraging, but it is only the beginning. The CPA must do more than provide services and repair infrastructure; it must also establish a secure environment for both coalition soldiers and the Iraqi people.

Friction Between Security and Legitimacy

The military battle for security in Iraq often conflicts with the information battle for legitimacy. While one can debate whether current operations in Iraq should be classified as a war or a military operation other than war (MOOTW), principles of the latter provide a good lens for analysis, and the principles of legitimacy and security are of particular interest in this case. Joint Publication 3-0 defines security in MOOTW as the ability to "never permit hostile factions to acquire an unexpected advantage."⁹ Implied in this definition are the soldier's duties of self-defense and the protection of noncombatants. In Iraq this means not only defensive force protection, but also offensive operations to forestall terrorist or guerrilla attacks. Legitimacy is the ability to "sustain the willing acceptance by the people of the government to govern."¹⁰ In Iraq,

the battle for legitimacy is compounded because the U.S. forces are fighting to gain or maintain legitimacy in the eyes of three different constituencies: the international community, the American people, and the Iraqi people. The need for both legitimacy and security in Iraq is undeniable—and perhaps paradoxical.

The friction between security and legitimacy exists in the transition phase in Iraq because it has proven extremely difficult to provide security against guerrilla attacks. In order to quell guerrilla resistance, the military's response to sniper shootings or random bombings has been conventional: "American troops raid homes in broad sweeps, arresting anyone caught in their net,"¹¹ but this tactic invariably leads to the arrest of many innocent Iraqi civilians, people who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The soldier's natural focus on security leads coalition forces to treat apprehended Iraqi civilians as captured insurgents until they can distinguish them. Two examples illustrate the point. When U.S. soldiers raided the house of a suspected Hussein loyalist, they showed up with 120 soldiers, six helicopters, and several tanks. In the end, the soldiers left with over 70 men and boys, many handcuffed and hooded; most had been wrestled or shoved to the ground in front of other family members. After ten days of questioning, the sheik and his family were released with an apology and a request for help in the future. "Stop humiliating us," he advised. "Do not wound our dignity . . . by making people lie on the ground, handcuffed, and putting your feet on their heads."¹² In another recent example, a demonstration by thousands of Iraqis outside a Baghdad slum erupted in violence. Some demonstrators threw stones, then fired rifles and a rocket-propelled grenade at U.S. forces monitoring the demonstration. The U.S. soldiers responded by firing into the crowd, killing one Iraqi civilian and wounding four others.¹³ Such incidents erode the legitimacy of the CPA with the Iraqi people.

Thus U.S. forces struggle to balance security needs against legitimacy needs. Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, V Corps Commander, recently acknowledged that “maybe our iron-fisted approach to the conduct of ops is beginning to alienate Iraqis.”¹⁴ Accordingly, he ordered commanders to raid specific targets instead of sweeping neighborhoods. But this technique may hinder U.S. soldiers in capturing guerrillas. Perhaps tightening rules of engagement (ROE) to lessen the chances of inadvertently killing innocent Iraqis might increase American legitimacy with Iraqis, but it would also decrease security. By limiting the size and scope of raids, coalition forces would detain fewer innocent Iraqis, but also capture fewer Ba'athist guerrillas. More restrictive ROE would surely lead to greater vulnerability to guerrilla attacks. If it means winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and ultimately winning the peace, then the trade-off of legitimacy for security might be worth the risk. After all, the ultimate objective of war is to bend the opponent to one's will, and the state readily accepts the possibility of casualties when it wields force to do that.

However, when waging an information war, attacking the “enemy” with information instead of force, willingness to accept casualties in pursuit of victory seems to wane. When told to “take the hill,” commanders don't refuse the mission because they expect to take casualties. Casualties are an unfortunate but expected part of a shooting war, and it is the commander's job to accomplish the mission while *minimizing* casualties, but in MOOTW the balance between casualties and mission success is especially obscure. At the end of an information campaign one can't claim victory by standing on top of the hill, yet the commander's responsibilities remain the same—to accomplish the mission. However, without a clear balance between mission success and casualties, commanders find it justifiably difficult to put their soldiers in harm's way. When U.S. soldiers are mostly launching information salvos and their opponents are launching

RPGs in return, another point of friction between security and legitimacy appears: less vigorous security measures might gain some legitimacy with the Iraqi people, but increasing U.S. casualties would risk losing legitimacy with the American people.

Weaknesses of Post-War Doctrine

Friction between security and legitimacy in the post-combat phase of OIF highlights the need for a sound information plan. Another doctrinal problem is the failure of military planners to adequately incorporate post-war practices in the campaign plan for OIF. It is a doctrinal problem because the professional definitions of war termination and the transition phase of a campaign don't adequately address events that are important in reconciling the people to their occupation. Campaign doctrine also doesn't emphasize that victory on the battlefield in Phase III, "Decisive Operations," isn't necessarily decisive in achieving the political objectives of the war. To win the transition phase requires making the right decisions in earlier phases of the campaign.

Joint doctrine describes decisive operations as "overmatching force capabilities . . . to achieve the desired End State."¹⁵ While the Iraqi armed forces and government have been destroyed, decisive operations may have proven to be something less than truly decisive, if the over-arching end state of war is to impose the nation's will on the enemy. That is partly the rub in the planning and execution of OIF: identifying the enemy. In an earnest wish to fight the war in a civilized manner and through natural sympathies for the oppressed, the President and his policymakers made it clear that the United States was at war with the Ba'athist regime and not the Iraqi people. True to President Bush's word, military forces were aimed at the Iraqi government and the military while scrupulously avoiding the people, entirely in keeping with Just War

traditions. But the laudable separation of the people from the state in American policy and in the coalition's use of force may have resulted in a failure to consider the will of the Iraqi people as an *informational* target across all phases. While some charge that this lapse is due in part to the influence on transition planning of optimistic Iraqi expatriates like Ahmad Chalabi,¹⁶ American doctrine makes little provision for such planning. The coalition assumed that the decisive defeat of the Iraqi military and government would reconcile the Iraqi people to their liberation and persuade them to peacefully accept occupation, but one cannot address the Clausewitzian elements of military and government without also addressing the people.

Clausewitz categorizes the state at war into three components: "the military power, the country, and the will of the enemy."¹⁷ In modern terms, Clausewitz's "country" includes the infrastructure of government, and the "enemy" includes the people of the state. This then is the famous Clausewitzian "trinity" of the state, and in planning the campaign, U.S. planners separated one leg of the trinity from the others. Yet if one is to believe Clausewitz, each of the three legs of the trinity must submit to one's will before hostilities will end. This is not to advocate attacking noncombatants, but it does mean that influencing the people can't be taken for granted as a result of attacking the other two legs of the trinity, and it also means that influencing the national will can't be deferred to the last phase. While the coalition planned for the doctrinal transition phase by "bring[ing] operations to a successful conclusion," it struggles today with "[ensuring] that the threat (military and/or political) is not able to resurrect itself."¹⁸ A Joint Chiefs of Staff report, "Operation Iraqi Freedom Strategic Lessons Learned," laments the focus on decisive operations at the expense of transition planning: "Phase IV objectives (transition) were identified but the scope of the effort required to continually refine operational plans for [the] defeat of [the] Iraqi military limited the focus on Phase IV."¹⁹ Reconciling the people to defeat is

necessary for winning the peace, and that reconciliation should not merely be a principle of transition planning; it should also influence the planning of earlier phases of the campaign.

Focusing on the decisive operations phase of war, then occupying Iraq with minimum force may have failed to reconcile many Iraqis with the death of the dictatorship. The coalition forces in Iraq were quite sufficient for a military victory, but insufficient for an informational victory, failing to convince the Iraqi people that the coalition had irrevocably removed the Ba'athist military and state. Iraq may be a case where it took less force to achieve a military decision than it will to establish “self-sustaining peace and . . . the rule of law,”²⁰ the U.S. doctrinal conditions for transition. As soon as decisive operations were over, follow-on deployments were canceled—or rather deferred to the current rotations of occupation forces. Coalition forces did not occupy Iraq with overwhelming force, did not march victorious through the main avenues of Baghdad, and are not widely visible to the people. Instead, coalition forces rely on their tactical mobility and overwhelming firepower to rush, like fire brigades, to the scenes of unrest. If the so-called “dead-enders” of the Hussein regime are able to find even tacit support among the Iraqi people, it is partly because U.S. commitment at the local level tends to be transitory. Unless the coalition forces stay, the guerrillas will return tomorrow—and the Iraqis know that. A DOD-sponsored report on post-war Iraq by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) laments the lack of security, and indirectly suggests the informational or psychological effect needed. It concedes that the coalition force is considerable, but charges, “It is not visible enough at the street level.”²¹ Under these circumstances, it is understandable if some Iraqis either fight alongside the guerrillas or passively support them.

Another facet of reconciliation that is missing from U.S. doctrine is the traditional act of surrender. The act of surrender is important in persuading a people to fulfill their obligations

under occupation, and must be planned for continuously, without waiting for the military decision. Joint doctrine says, “Conflict termination should be considered from the outset of planning and should be refined as the conflict moves toward advantageous termination.”²² Termination must be a deliberate rather than a hasty politico-military operation, and it may even require preserving part of the enemy’s government for that purpose. Granted, a surrender ceremony was made difficult by Saddam’s flight into hiding. That made it harder to identify anyone willing to represent Iraq, but a surrender ceremony, even if conducted by relatively low-level officials of the defeated government, is not even included in U.S. definitions of transition or termination. In a war where regime change is the objective, a surrender ceremony formally transfers custody of some or all of a nation’s sovereignty from the enemy government to the occupier. Such a symbolic maneuver is an important step in winning the information war in transition, but it must be a consideration in planning for decisive operations.

The United States also made surrender more difficult by criminalizing most members of the Ba’athist regime before victory—exemplified by the famous deck of playing cards. Even in a war with one of the most inarguably evil regimes in history, the Allies accepted the surrenders of leading Nazi officers at the end of World War II. The Nazi government was either dead or in hiding, yet the Allies accepted the surrender of the German military. Afterwards the victors indeed prosecuted Admiral Doenitz and his colleagues for war crimes, but until surrender ceremonies were complete, they were treated as the custodians of German sovereignty. Planning for regime change should continuously identify prospective custodians within the enemy government, and operations should actively preserve the ability of the enemy to surrender. Surrender, the last public act of the old regime, makes it more difficult for “dead-enders” to sustain resistance, and demonstrates a “due process” approach to ending hostilities. This is important be-

cause it demonstrates the rule of law, setting the conditions for transition. Thus surrender should be a doctrinal consideration for transition.

Iraq's notorious past is another impediment to winning the information war in Iraq, one that also requires a public demonstration of the rule of law. Many Iraqis are reluctant to cooperate with the CPA because of the lingering fear of Saddam Hussein, and how the coalition handles past crimes will have important implications for its information campaign and Iraq's future. The recent deaths of Oodai and Qusai Hussein, and the eventual death or capture of their father, are important, but not decisive by themselves. Just as Hitler's suicide was an important step towards, but not the end of, reconciling Germans to their lost war, Iraqis must ultimately confront what happened. While the United States and other countries have grievances against Ba'athist leaders, it would be a miscalculation to imprison them outside of Iraq, either without any trials or with secretive proceedings. The CSIS called on the coalition "to assist the Iraqis dealing with the war crimes and the legacy of Saddam Hussein."²³ The coalition must hold public proceedings in Iraq with Iraqis participating, ceding jurisdiction to the Iraqi court in selected cases where other countries (including the United States) may have a claim for prosecution. Public proceedings on Iraqi soil will convince skeptics that Saddam's repressive Ba'ath regime is gone forever. The benefits of demonstrating the rule of law in a new Iraq obviate the risk of injustice, and they indicate the need for greater development in U.S. doctrine of the importance of public trials for war crimes and human rights abuses. The transition plan must provide for them.

To gain and maintain the initiative in persuading the populace of the defeated state, the United States should have planned for immediate, massive "informational assistance" in the transition phase, just as it planned for large-scale humanitarian assistance. The CSIS reconstruction assessment characterizes the communication between the CPA and Iraqis as "insufficient," and it

calls for “drastic changes . . . to immediately improve the daily flow of practical information to the Iraqi people, principally through enhanced radio and TV programming.”²⁴ In earlier phases of the war, the United States had planned for a Ba’athist scorched-earth campaign, with flaming oil fields, blown bridges, and thousands of displaced and starving persons. The coalition stock-piled medical supplies, food, and water for the noncombatants. It made prudent provisions for a disaster that largely didn’t happen, but it has apparently failed to make the same provisions for information, overestimating the survivability of Iraqi information systems and failing to quickly install Iraqi news media beyond sporadic TV transmissions, leaflet drops, and COMMANDO SOLO broadcasts. The coalition failed to quickly hire and train Iraqis to run the TV and radio broadcasts, purchase equipment, or manage the distribution of quality print media. The CSIS report points out that the CPA could have hired “a large number of Iraqi ‘animators’ to carry and receive messages” even before the war started.²⁵ Instead, the CPA is scrambling to bolster its communications several weeks after large-scale fighting has ended. While the CPA will probably make up the difference, the coalition forces failed to include enough informational resources in their initial deployments. That was due in part to the decisive operations tunnel-vision already described, but informational assistance gets scant attention in the doctrinal concept of transition. Material assistance dominates, as it probably should, but U.S. doctrine should include planning for staging informational forces in Phases I-III in the same way that it considers combat or logistical forces.

CONCLUSION

Lawrence Di Rita, a special assistant to the Secretary of Defense, sums up one of the lessons of OIF this way: “We’ve always thought of post-hostilities as a phase [distinct from combat] The future of war is that these things are going to be much more of a continuum.”²⁶

The challenge for the United States and the CPA is to change their thoughts and doctrine, to approach post-hostilities along such a continuum. That requires a reexamination of campaign phasing as well as the principles of war and MOOTW, refining those phases and principles to fully incorporate post-hostilities and nation-building activities. In the end, such a revision could very well result in the elimination of the principles of MOOTW or their combination with the principles of war. As discussed, influencing all of the sources of an enemy's will cannot be put off to the last phase of a military operation. As the one remaining superpower, America's influence is great, but the U.S. national security establishment must apply that influence coherently throughout the continuum of pre-hostilities, combat, and post-hostilities. Someday, the United States will again inherit or create another obligation as it has in Iraq, and when that happens, it must be better prepared to fulfill that obligation.

ENDNOTES

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⁷ Mary Ann Casey, lecture, Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia, July 2003. Quoted by permission of Ambassador Casey, per conversation between S. Zelle and Ambassador Casey, 20 January 2004, Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia.

⁸ Garth Horne, telephone interview by William J. Martin, 1 August 2003. MAJ Horne was serving as a battalion operations officer with 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division in Baghdad.

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²⁴ John Hamre, et al., p. ii.

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